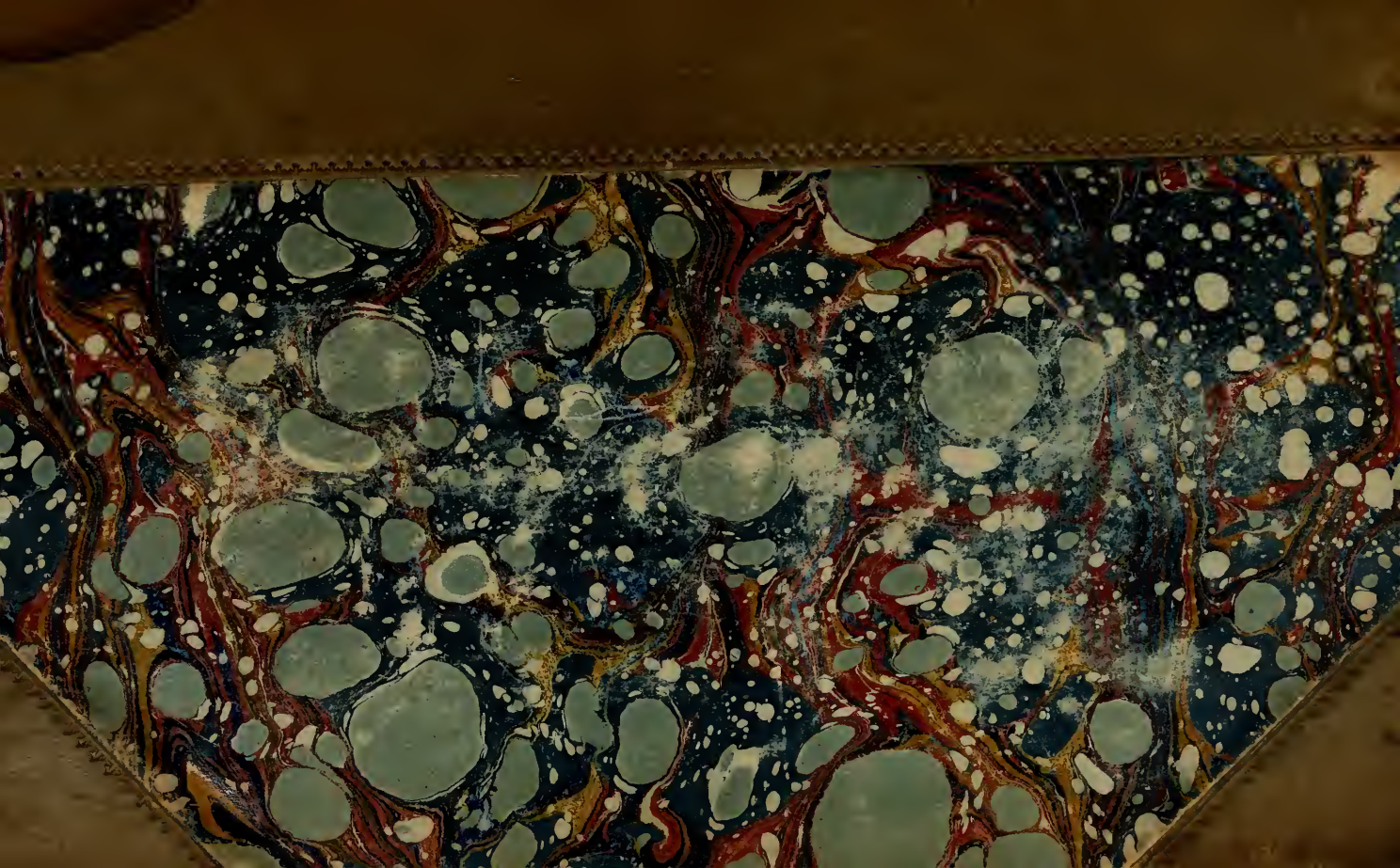

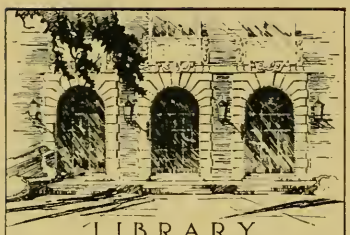

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A PAPER

"ON THE EXTENSION OF THE FACTORY SYSTEM OF EDUCATION TO THE AGRICULTURAL CLASSES IN THIS COUNTRY."

BY

EDWD. AKROYD, M.P.,

AT THE

Educational Conference,

HELD AT LEICESTER,

JANUARY 27, 1870.

ALSO, A LETTER ON THE SAME SUBJECT FROM

THE HONOURABLE EDWARD STANHOPE,

One of H. M. Assistant Commissioners on the Employment of Children in Agriculture (1867).

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[No. 07.]

A Paper read at the Leicester Conference, Jan. 27th, 1870, *by Edward Akroyd, M.P., on the "Extension of the Factory System of Education to the Agricultural Classes of this Country."*

HITHERTO, the only plan of compulsory attendance at primary day schools, which has received the sanction of the Legislature, is that under the half-time system embodied in the Factory and Workshops Acts:—that is, half-day attendance at work, and half-days at school. When the conditions of labour permit of this arrangement, the system works admirably. I can speak with the authority of a long experience, having, for upwards of twenty years taken an active part as manager of my own factory schools, in which there is now a daily average attendance of 900 half-timers, 230 day scholars, and 300 infants, or a total of 1,430. Under this system, the enforcement of the attendance of children at school is imposed on the employer, as a condition of admittance to work; and he must obtain from the schoolmaster a voucher proving the attendance of the child at school during the previous week. These provisions are enforced by penalties, to which both the employer and the parent are liable. No child is permitted to work under eight years of age; and the period of half-time attendance at school continues from eight to thirteen.

Under the cumbrous system in America, there is the greatest possible difficulty in enforcing school attendance; and, although special officers—called "Truant officers"—are appointed for this purpose, yet the number of truants, compared with the number of children at school, is

exceedingly large, varying from 20 o/o to 40 o/o of the total number on the register. There is no such difficulty in enforcing school attendance under the *indirect* compulsion of the Factory Act. In the year 1868 there were about 81,000 half-timers, and of this number there were only twenty convictions against persons employing children without school-vouchers, out of twenty-seven informations; and this notwithstanding a very strict inspection. Thus, with a simple machinery, at a very slight cost, strict and regular attendance at school is enforced.

Respecting this principle of indirect compulsion, I am happy to adduce the evidence of Mr. Tremenheere, one of the Commissioners on the employment of children, young persons, and women in agriculture. In clauses 76, 77, 78, and 79 of the Second Report, he says:—"The only principle approaching the nature of compulsion, in regard to the education of the young of the labouring class above the grade of paupers, that has, up to this time, been admitted into the legislation of this country, is that of connecting the obligation of school attendance with wages-earning employment. This principle rests on a just view of the extent to which parental obligation may be enforced, and permits the Legislature to say that if a parent benefits by the labour of his child he shall be compelled to apply a portion of the child's earnings in the fulfilment of his duty to his child, and for his child's advantage, viz., in procuring for it a certain amount of education. Public opinion in this country justly sanctions the enforcement of such an obligation upon the parent by fine or imprisonment. The Workshop Regulation Act, which embraces all kinds of handicrafts, not included in the Factory Acts, in defining 'employment' to mean occupation in any handicraft, whether for wages or not, under a master, or under a parent, thus describes the liability of the parent in case of a child being employed in contravention of the Act." (Sec. 7.) "The parent

"of, or the person deriving any direct benefit from, the "labour of, or having the control over the child * * shall "be liable to a penalty of not more than 20s., unless it "appears to the Court before whom the complaint is heard "that the offence has been committed without the consent, "connivance, or wilful default of the parent or person so "benefited, or having such control." "And by sec. 12, "this penalty is recoverable summarily in the manner "directed by the Act 11 and 12 Vic., cap. 43, which gives "the power of imprisonment if the penalty is not paid."

The question remains to be considered, how the principle is to be applied to the children employed in agriculture, and how it is to be adapted to the altered conditions of labour in the rural districts. It must be remembered that all children, save and except those engaged in agriculture, are now subject to this condition of compulsory attendance at school, as a certificate to half-time work. We may best estimate the amount of educational work still to be done by an approximate calculation of the total number of children of school age—say between 5 and 12 or 13—engaged in outdoor labour in the agricultural districts of England and Wales. Mr. Tremenheere, in clause 82 of the Report before alluded to, resting his calculation on the census returns of 1861, arrives at a total of 41,090; that is, about one-half of the number of those already in attendance at school under the factory half-time system. The figures are not formidable. Already a large proportion attend the national or other schools, and, hitherto, school accommodation has been in excess of school attendance. But the universal complaint on the part of school managers and masters is, that children leave the day school for work at the age of ten or eleven, and cease to attend after that period. This complaint is confirmed by the table issued by the Committee of Council on Education, showing the comparative age of scholars in schools, inspected by the inspectors of schools in Great Britain. In 1868 no

less than 72·28 were under 10 years of age, and 9·91 were between 10 and 11, 7·85 between 11 and 12, and 5·52 between 12 and 13; that is, a total of 23·28 between the age of 10 and 13, or together 95·56 under 13, leaving only 4·44 above the age of 13. Generally speaking, the education of the agricultural children ceases at 10 years of age, and can be of little avail in after life. No primary instruction, worthy of the name, which shall form the habits, and ripen the intelligence of the pupil, can be given unless regular attendance be secured at day schools to the age of thirteen years. Evening classes are worse than useless for children of tender years, who are more ready to fall asleep than to learn lessons which it is cruelty to enforce.

Hence the conclusion is forced upon us that some limitation of children's working hours is absolutely necessary to make room for school attendance. But first, the age at which work shall commence ought to be fixed. On this point there is a difference in opinion between the two Commissioners, Mr. Tremenheere and Mr. Tufnell. The latter inclines to believe that ten ought to be the age below which no child ought to work, and that ultimately it might be raised to eleven or twelve: whilst the former considers that no minimum age should be required, under which children should not be employed; except in the cases of those who look after horses, when he would fix ten as the minimum. He further states, that in many counties, as Yorkshire to wit, children go out to work at eight or nine years.

From this conflicting evidence, I draw the conclusion that there is no valid reason why there should be any deviation from the minimum age of eight fixed by the Factory Acts. Moreover, under this limit, there is abundant opportunity for attendance at infant schools, and the acquisition of the art of reading before entering in the

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half-time schools. A satisfactory examination in reading at, or after the age of eight, might be insisted upon before the child goes to work at all. This preliminary examination has been tried with beneficial results by Mr. Paget, of Ruddington, formerly M.P. for Nottingham.

We proceed to consider the adaptation of the half-time system to agricultural labour. Clearly, half-day attendance is out of the question. Half the day would be lost in going backwards and forwards from work to school. Alternate days' schooling has been tried by Mr. Paget; but as farming operations depend much on the weather, the system could not be strictly applied. During harvest, all school attendance must of necessity be suspended. Of all the plans proposed, that of the Honourable Edward Stanhope, one of Her Majesty's Assistant Commissioners, seems to me the most feasible. Briefly stated, his proposition is to require one hundred days' school attendance in each year, from eight to thirteen, which would hardly interfere a single day with the exigencies of the farmer, and put the parent to no expense beyond the payment of small school fees. These one hundred days' attendance might be given so as to interfere to the slightest possible degree with farm labour. That feature of the plan which most commends itself to my approval, is its complete harmony with the principles of the Factory Acts, and with all past legislation.*

One further condition might be necessary to ensure a sufficient amount of instruction; namely, that no child who should have attained the age of thirteen, after the passing of the promised Education Bill, should be allowed

* Mr. Stanhope has favoured me with his views on the subject, which are entitled to more weight than my own, coming as they do from an official source, as the result of an inquiry extending over the following counties:—Lincoln, Notts, Leicester, Dorset, Kent, Chester, Salop, Stafford, and Rutland. His letter is appended to this Paper.

to work full time without a certificate of competency under the 5th standard of the Revised Code.

An outcry may be raised, should these provisions for compulsory attendance be enacted, that there is a deficiency of schools. This would be a refreshing change from the present state of things, when the complaint is that there is a lack of scholars to fill existing schools. But what are the facts as to existing school accommodation? In the report of the National Society for 1869, it is stated that "as far as the Church of England alone is "concerned, the society's census of schools reveals the fact, "that of the 14,709 parishes, chapelries, and other eccle- "siastical districts in England and Wales, only 338 are "destitute of week-day schools; and at the same time, so "far removed from schools in adjoining parishes, that "children cannot attend them. Most of the places unpro- "vided with schools are thinly inhabited, 35 per cent. "having a population of less than 300."

From this statement it appears that there are few parishes destitute of schools, or beyond reach of school attendance. Where new schools are required, I cannot doubt that they will be built by voluntary effort, aided by Government grants, bestowed more liberally, than is usual, in poor districts. Indeed voluntary agency is more certain, and less fluctuating, than Government aid. Periodically, the Chancellor of the Exchequer uses the pruning knife, and cuts down the education estimates, as in 1864 and 1865.

Wherever the Factory Act has been introduced, rendering it to the interest of employers to provide school accommodation, there has never been any lack of schools. In the smaller hamlets, where schools do not exist, a convenient cottage-house might often answer every purpose of a school. I have tried the experiment with satisfactory results in a village in the East Riding of Yorkshire, where

I spend the autumn. An ordinary room in a cottage with a brick floor and a fire-place comfortably accommodates a group of about twenty children, in a day school under a mistress. The same place is used as a club-room in the evening, where the farmers' lads and young men can sit and smoke, and read the newspapers. During two evenings in the week, an adult class is taught by a schoolmaster from a neighbouring village. Upon the whole, I believe that a habitable room of this kind is preferred by the pupils, children or adults, to a more handsome and pretentious fabric, built strictly in accordance with the regulations of the Committee of Council on Education.

Of the success of this proposed extension of the half-time system to the agricultural districts, if fairly tried, I have not the slightest doubt. Small farmers may at first take alarm at the condition of school attendance, and the interference with the children's work; but this alarm will vanish after a slight experience, as it has done with employers brought successively under the operation of the Factory Acts. All trouble of making out the certificates of school attendance rests with the schoolmaster; and the farmer has only to send the children to school for the requisite number of days.

Intelligent labour is, in the long run, cheaper than ignorant labour; and the introduction of scientific farming has necessitated the training of a superior class of labourers to that of the old clodhopper. Any pecuniary loss of work by school attendance will be more than compensated to the employer by the improved character of his farm servants. Let us also hope that the social condition and morality of agricultural labourers will be thus gradually improved.

10, King's Bench Walk, Temple,
February 24th, 1870.

Dear Mr. Akroyd,

In reply to your question respecting the inquiry lately carried on by the Commission on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, as to the application of the principles of the Factory Acts to the country districts, I think the general results of their investigations may be shortly summarised as follows:—

(1.) The age at which boys are required by the exigencies of farm work for occasional or for regular employment varies in all parts of England. Speaking generally, however, *occasional* employment (taking children away from school for periods varying from a few weeks to six months or more) is most to be found in the Eastern counties, in those special districts where the cultivation of hops is carried on, and in the market gardens in the neighbourhood of large towns.

On all heavy soils there is rarely much *occasional* employment for children, but *regular* employment with horses begins at an age varying from eight or nine in the South-Western counties, to twelve or fourteen in the North of England.

On all light soils on the contrary, where good farming exists, the *occasional* labour is the chief difficulty in the way of school attendance; and, ploughing being easier, boys are less wanted for regular work at an early age. It is on these soils only, and for brief periods, that girls are found to be employed. It is quite clear, therefore, that it is to this class of soils that the principle of half-time employment is most easy of application; and this is partially

borne out by the fact that on the Wolds of Lincolnshire, and in many parts of the North of England where the desire for education is not inactive, the parents themselves contrive to carry out some such system, sending their children to school in the winter, or whenever they are not employed. And it is found in practice that the interruption to the regular work of a school, which is the chief objection commonly urged to any such system, is not very embarrassing to the teacher, because a short experience enables him to reckon with absolute certainty when all the children of a fixed age will, or will not, be wanted on the farms.

(2.) Throughout the district assigned to me, which comprised nearly one-fourth part of England, and I believe in almost all the other counties, the greatest complaint of school teachers was, not that the children never attended school at all, but that even the very best schools in agricultural districts were losing them altogether at just the age when they would be likely to begin to see the value of education. The impression made is so slight that, after a very few years, all useful recollection of what they have learnt passes away. A remarkable statement on this point was made to me by a teacher of very great experience in Dorsetshire, that amongst those who attended his night-school he was often unable to detect any difference between those who had attended a day-school and those who had not. (Second Report, II. p. 19.) All the evidence indeed points to the fact that, in agricultural districts, comparatively few children are wholly untaught, but still fewer are kept at school long enough to retain what they have learnt.

In one district comprising the greater part of Lincolnshire and Notts, the Rev. Capel Sewell, Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, speaking only of the inspected schools, which contain a far higher proportion of the older children than any others, says that out of every 100

children on the books over six years of age, only eight were over ten. In Leicestershire, from the inferiority of the schools, the case was even worse. (First Report, I. 87.) So, again, in Kent, the average age of withdrawal is ten, or in dames'-schools nine. In Dorset it falls to eight or nine. In Cheshire and Staffordshire the children leave between ten and eleven, and in Shropshire perhaps rather younger. (Second Report, I. 18.) These instances, drawn from my own experience, might be indefinitely multiplied, and it should be remembered, also, that as in all these cases I speak of the *average* age, many boys must be withdrawn even at an earlier age.

There is some reason also to believe that the age of total withdrawal from school is gradually dropping. Upon this point the evidence is very conflicting, but it is an undoubted fact that the establishment of good schools has in many cases contributed to this result, because the small amount of knowledge considered necessary by the parents is attained at an earlier age than formerly.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is, that no system will be sufficient which dispenses with partial attendance at school before twelve or thirteen years of age at the earliest, whatever degree of proficiency may previously have been attained.

(3.) It must also be admitted that on clay soils the application of any half-time system appears to be especially difficult, because boys, when taken for employment with horses, are wanted regularly throughout the year. It is, however, a very disputed question, upon which much evidence will be found in the Reports of the Commission, especially from the county of Dorset, whether on physical grounds alone there is not sufficient reason for interfering with such labour before the age of twelve at the earliest. The hours of work are long (Second Report, II. 20), the amount of labour is great (for walking eleven or twelve

miles a day over ploughed ground cannot be thought easy for very young children. Second Report, II. 20), and in most counties it will be found that no farmer would dream of putting boys, unless very exceptionally strong, to such work before eleven or twelve years of age.

I think it may, therefore, also be laid down that any interference with children's labour ought to include some means of preventing them from *continuous* employment all the year before, at least, twelve years of age.

(4.) Bearing in mind these considerations, is any system of half-time practicable? Upon this point the experiment of Mr. Paget, late M.P. for Nottingham, at Ruddington on the clay soil of Notts is so important, and so little understood, that a brief statement of the conclusions to which it has led may not be useless.

It appears then that, even under the most favourable circumstances, such as those at Ruddington, a rigid system of half-time, by which I mean the requirement of school attendance on half-days, alternate days or weeks, turned out to be impracticable. How much more it would be so in districts where juvenile labour is more necessary to farm cultivation, is apparent from every page of these Reports.

His system was accordingly altered to requiring the boys to attend school on alternate days, *except at the special seasons,* when such labour was very much in request. (First Report, I. 88.) The result of this was twofold. It is described by Mr. Paget as a gain to him as a farmer, for on any day "when he wants more boys to drive carts, he "informs the schoolmaster, and only pays the boys for the "time that they are at work." (First Report, II. 318.) It should also be borne in mind that of all the different half-time experiments which have been attempted in agricultural districts (a full account of which will be found in the Second Report, I. 21, and II. 95), Mr. Paget's is the only one which has attempted to grapple with the

necessity of an increased amount of such labour at certain seasons of the year.

The second result of the system was that the amount of school attendance which is completed by the boys under it amounts only to ninety-one days in the year; and yet, without the school discipline being disturbed (for "no alteration," says Mr. Spencer, the master of the school, "is required in the mode of conducting the school." First Report, II. 318), the education attained by these lads is thoroughly satisfactory, and even surpasses that which I for one am disposed to expect of all children.

(5.) These then are the considerations which have led me, in the two Reports which I addressed to the Commission, to recommend most strongly in the case of all children engaged in field labour, that they should be required, as a condition of such employment, to attend school for a period of (say) 100 days during every year up to twelve or thirteen years of age. The simplest mode of enforcing any such system appears to me to be to require before employment, in any given year, a certificate of school attendance during the previous year. There would be no difficulty in point of detail in carrying out such a provision, and there is strong ground for believing that the jealousy which would be created between certificated and uncertificated children would prevent any very easy evasion of the rule.

One objection which has been raised to this proposal is, "why not fix at once the winter months for attendance, as "that is the period when the children are most free?" My answer to this is, that there are districts (parts of Lincoln and Leicester, for instance) where boys of eleven or twelve are in more request in winter than in summer; and there are others where, immediately before harvest, there is an interval of a month or more when such labour can be entirely dispensed with. If the principle of fixing certain times when employment is to be

legal is once admitted, the very great variety which prevails in all parts of the country, would cause considerable difficulty. "In potato districts, for instance, children of all "ages are much needed in October, and boys of eleven "during part of the winter; for pea pulling, children are "wanted in June; for onion peeling, in April; for hop pick-"ing, in September; for fruit gathering, in July; and "interference with these would in every case reduce the area "under the crop." (Second Report, I. 20.)

The wisest course, therefore, appears to be to leave open the exact periods of school attendance for the decision of men of local experience, and to lay down only the general principle that all parents who send their children to earn shall send them also to school for a certain part of every year.

It cannot be pretended that any such system is a perfect one, but it appears to me to be "the best possible under "the circumstances, and likely not to defeat its own aim by "putting an end to employment."

I ought perhaps to add, that in my opinion the success of any such system mainly depends on all children having obtained a fair elementary education at infant schools before entering at all upon field labour. It might reasonably be enacted that no children should be employed before eight years of age, and even then only on condition of passing some easy test examination. Before that age the difficulty of poverty does not arise, because the parents would actually be glad to get rid of their children for the day.

I remain,
Yours truly,
EDWARD STANHOPE,
Late Assistant Commissioner on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture.

NOTE.—For Papers and Circulars for gratuitous distribution, and for information as to the objects, plans, and operations of the National Education Union, apply to the Rev. W. STANYER, M.A., General Secretary, Manchester.